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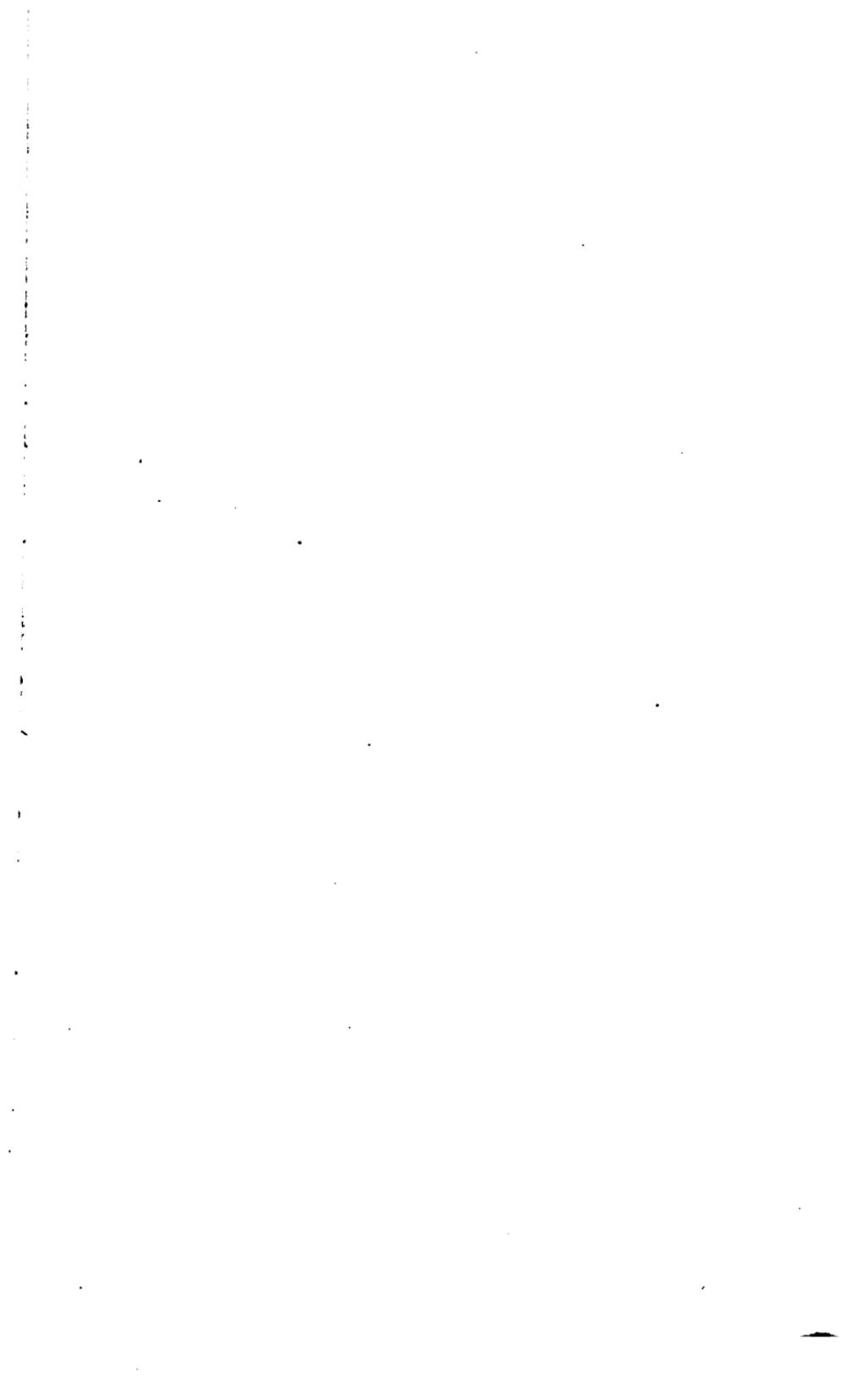
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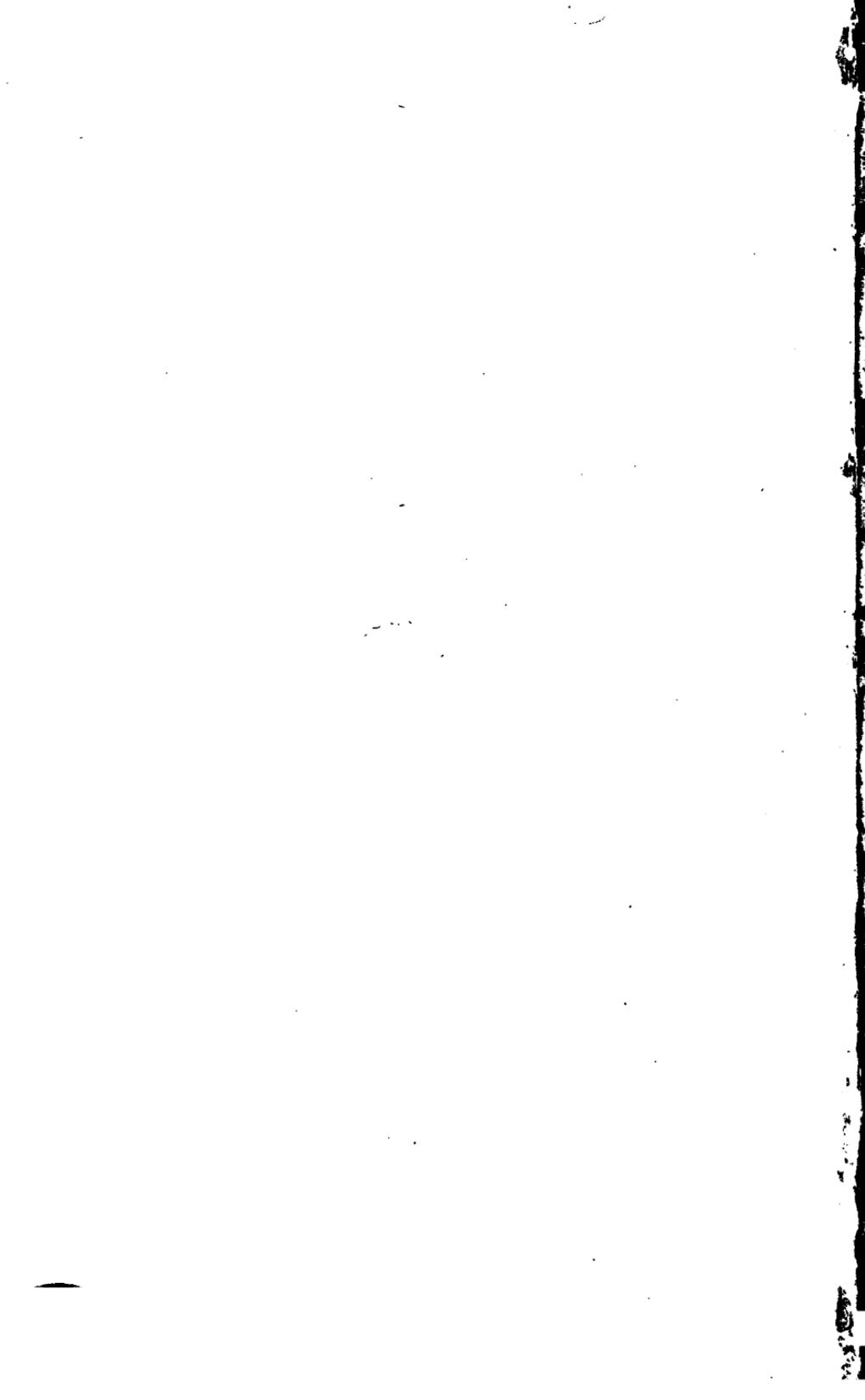
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LETTERS

TO THE

MEMBERS

OF



The New Jerusalem Church,

FORMED BY

BARON SWEDENBORG.

By Joseph Priestley, LL.D. F.R.S. &c.

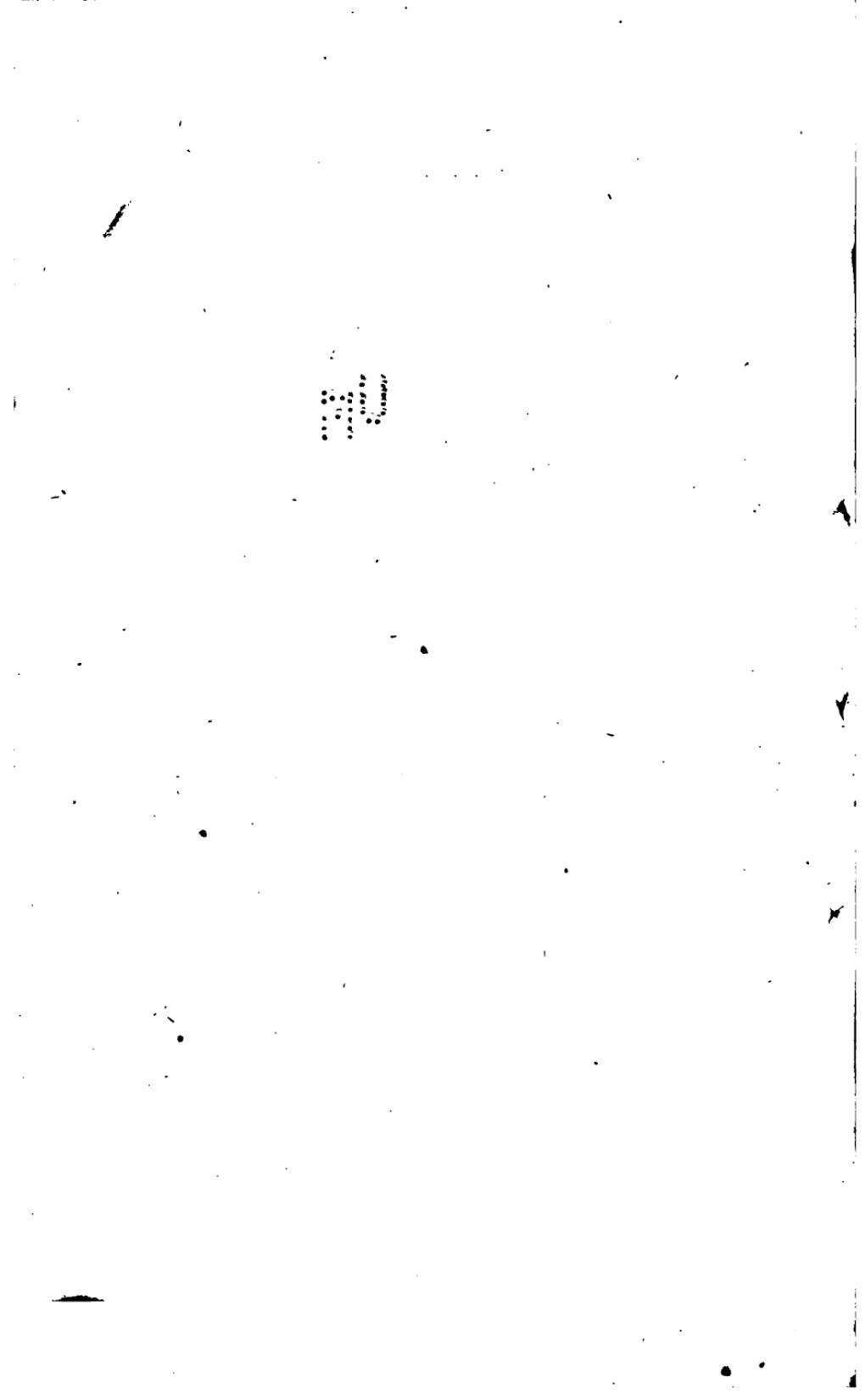
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THE PREFACE.

.....

MANY of my readers, to whom Baron Swedenborg and his religion are but little known, will perhaps wonder what it was that drew my attention to them. It was the forming of a church, and the building of a very elegant place of worship, for persons of this persuasion at Birmingham, and my acquaintance with the ministers and leading members of the church. To a christian every thing relating to christianity will be more or less interesting ; and so striking a variety in the modes of christian faith and practice as this, together with the evident good sense, and good conduct, of all that I was acquainted with of this persuasion, drew my attention in a particular manner.

They were so obliging as to supply me with as many of the writings of Mr. Swedenborg as I wished to see. I read them with care, and the consequence was these *Letters*, addressed to the members of the *New Jerusalem Church*, as they call themselves. Living in friendship with them, I had made an appointment to read the Letters in manuscript to the minister, and the heads of the society, on Friday the 15th of July. But the night before this, the zealots of the church of England, when I had no suspicion of any outrage of the kind, demolished my house, library, apparatus, and every thing that they could. lay hold of belonging to me, and would, I now believe, have destroyed myself if they had got me in their power.

The fair copy of these Letters, which was to have been delivered to the printer on the Monday following, was destroyed, together with my other manuscripts. But I happened to have taken a copy of them in their first and more imperfect state, by Messrs. Boulton and Watt's machine, and that copy was in the hands of a friend.

Being

PREFACE.

v

Being in London presently after this, and having nothing else to do, having no laboratory to work in, and incapable of being wholly idle ; besides writing *An Appeal to the Public on the Subject of the Riots in Birmingham*, which will appear in due time, I employed myself in transcribing these *Letters*, and recomposing, as well as I could, the parts of which I had no copy ; Mr. Hindmarsh, the printer of Baron Swedenborg's writings, obligingly supplying me with books for that purpose. I had desired my friends in Birmingham, who collected the remains of my Library, to send me every book they could find relating to the Swedenborgians. But of a great number of volumes, nothing of any consequence was found, except what was torn in a shocking manner, so that no use could be made of them. Such has been the triumph of bigotry and party spirit.

I cannot help observing on this occasion, as on a thousand others, how much the least cause of resentment tends to stifle every emotion of sympathy and compassion.

Had any person whatever spent a great part of his life in the merely innocent employment of collecting medals, watching with the utmost anxiety every opportunity of completing his suite; had another given the same time to a collection of shells, fossils, prints, or books of any particular class, without any farther view than that of amusing himself and his friends; and any of his neighbours, who knew in what manner, and how long, he had been employed, have come and destroyed the labours of his life in an hour, there are few persons, I believe, who would not have felt for the injury. For every man's labours are of value to himself; and every man has a natural right to enjoy the fruit of his labours, provided they do not interfere with the enjoyments of others. An injury of this kind would be considered as an injury done to society itself, which engages for the protection of every individual in the quiet enjoyment of his innocent gratifications and pursuits, whatever they be. Every person would make the case his own, and have considered what he himself would have felt, not after having spent his life

life in the same pursuits, because for them he might have had no particular taste, but in any pursuit equally pleasing to him, and would have resented the injury with the greatest sensibility.

Had this person's pursuits been of acknowledged utility to the public, and in the eye of the world done credit to his country, and to his age; had they been the labours of a Boyle, a Newton, or a Franklin, or those of a Pope, an Addison, or a Locke, that had been thus wantonly and maliciously destroyed, all the world in a manner, and his country in particular, would have taken fire at the injury, and have thought no punishment too great for it.

But let *politics*, or *religion*, be concerned; let the curious collector, the naturalist, the poet, or the philosopher, be suspected to be of an unpopular party in either, and the very circumstance that would have filled his countrymen with compassion for him, and with rage against his plunderers, would make many rejoice in the mischief; and

without the least regard to the innocence, or public merit, of his pursuits, they would receive a gratification from the idea of their hereby having it in their power to give him and his friends the more sensible pain. Nay, provided they conceived that any advantage would accrue from it to their party, they would take a savage pleasure in destroying him, and his labours together.

Such has been the scene exhibited at Birmingham, and I wish it may prove an instructive lesson to mankind. I do not say what I have been, or what I have done. But had I been a Boyle, a Newton, or a Franklin, or had I had ten times the merit of each, or of all of them, I am confident, from what I have heard and observed, that this circumstance would only have been an excitement to my enemies to the mischief they have done me. The higher I had stood in the good opinion of my friends, or of the public, the greater pleasure would they have taken in pulling me down.

This

This has, moreover, been done by persons who do not want private virtue, by persons of honour, justice, and feeling in common life; and who, if I had not been obnoxious to them on account of my *opinions*, would have relieved me in distress, and have done me any kindness in their power; nay who, if they had had any knowledge of literature or science, might perhaps have been proud of having me for a townsman and acquaintance, and have taken a pleasure in shewing strangers the place where I lived.

Had I been a clergyman of the church of England, of little or no reputation, and the injury been done by Dissenters, no punishment would have been thought sufficient for the perpetrators of so much wickedness, and, in the eyes of the nation, the whole sect would have been thought deserving of extirpation. Like the death of Charles I. the guilt of it would have been entailed upon our latest posterity.

I was

P R E F A C E.

I was forcibly struck with this idea on seeing a most ingenious imitation of plants in paper, cut and painted so like to nature, that, at a very small distance, no eye could have perceived the difference; and by this means they were capable of being preserved from the attacks of insects, so as to be greatly preferable to any *hortus siccus*. It appeared to me that weeks, and in some cases months, must have been employed on some single plants, so exquisitely were they finished.

What would this ingenious and deserving young lady have felt, how would her family and friends, how would all botanists, though they should only have heard of the ingenious contrivance, and the labour and time she had spent upon her plants; nay, how would the country in general have been filled with indignation, had any envious female neighbour come by force, or stealth, and thrown all her flowers into the fire, and thus destroyed all the fruits of her ingenuity, and patient working for years, in a single moment. And yet all this, excellent as it was,

was, might with certainty have been done again, and perhaps in an improved manner. If this particular lady had not had time, or inclination, to do the same work over again, she might have instructed others, and precautions might have been taken to prevent such a misfortune again.

But the havoc that was made in almost as short a space of time in my library and laboratory, neither myself or any body else can repair; and yet thousands, and ten thousands, I have no doubt, are so far from feeling any sympathy with me, or my friends, on the occasion, that they rejoice in it, and would rejoice the more in proportion as the irreparable mischief had been greater.

If the same malicious female should not only have thrown this lady's flowers into the fire, but ransacked her apartments, and, getting possession of all her private letters, have amused herself with reading them, and published them in all the neighbourhood, in order to do her all the injury in her power, would not the crime be thought worthy of
the

the severest punishment, as a violent breach of all the bonds of society? And yet in my case, this very outrage has been committed without any sense of guilt in the perpetrators, or the by-standers of the same party. Such is the baneful influence of party spirit.

.....

To return to the proper subject of this Preface, for my departure from which, my peculiar circumstances must be my apology. To many persons it will appear not a little extraordinary, that a scheme of religion so visionary, and so destitute of all rational *evidence*, as that of Baron Swedenborg, should be so firmly believed by such numbers of persons of unquestionable good sense, and the most upright intentions; and some may be disposed to say that christianity itself might have had no better an origin.

There is nothing, however, so improbable in itself, but what persons of a certain turn of mind, may not be pre-disposed to believe. And they who already believe the inspiration

inspiration of some persons, will easily admit that of others, who, in their idea, carry on the same scheme, or one similar to it. Thus the miracles of the popish saints were received without much difficulty, after those of the apostles and primitive christians.

Any person of reputable character, and not apparently insane, gravely and repeatedly asserting his inspiration, and his intercourse with God or angels, and advancing nothing contrary, or supposed to be contrary, to what other acknowledged prophets had advanced before him, will be believed by some; and the credit of these may in time be the means of procuring him credit with others. And thus it appears to me, that credit was acquired to the pretensions of Mahomet, and has been to those of Baron Swedenborg; while the military exploits of the former, who appealed to God on all occasions, and admitted the inspiration of Moses and of Christ, would lead numbers to conclude that God was really with him, and consequently that his pretensions were well-founded. Also, in the shockingly corrupted state of christianity

anity in the seventh century, Mahometanism would appear a more rational religion than it.

But when there is no appeal to *facts*, which any person may examine, such as miracles, obvious to the senses, men of less imagination, and more judgment, will hesitate, and converts will be made very slowly. This was the case at first with Mahomet, and much more so with Swedenborg, whose inspiration, as he pretended, commenced in the year 1743, and who died in 1772.

I own that I rather wonder at the strength of faith in Baron Swedenborg's followers, when I find that they do not pretend that any other person has had similar communications with God and the invisible world, in confirmation of his. We read that in the mouth of *two or three witnesses* shall every word be established. But with these persons *one witness* is deemed sufficient, and this in a business of infinitely more moment than those in which at least *two* were required. Prophets, and workers of miracles,

miracles, in confirmation of the Jewish and Christian dispensations, were exceedingly numerous.

One of the oldest things that I distinctly remember (for I was then only ten or twelve years of age) was a Quaker going about the country, and giving an account of a trance he was thrown into, in which he had a sight of heaven and hell. I do not remember much of the vision at present, though it made a great impression on my mind at the time; but it was intirely unlike any of the MEMORABLE RELATIONS* of Baron Swedenborg. The Quaker, however, was as serious and as good a man as the Baron could be, and as incapable of fraud.

Now, here is vision against vision, or rather dream against dream, and which of these are we to believe? I seriously believed the Quaker at the time, and so did many others. But he is now forgotten. There was a

* By this term Baron Swebenborg distinguishes his accounts of the intercourses he had with spirits, &c. in the spiritual world, in all his writings.

want of *concurrent evidence*, the consideration of which will in time affect the credibility of any single testimony, in things of much consequence. *Reasoning* requires no support from testimony, but, with persons of reflection, facts always do.

Baron Swedenborg, whose system of religion is discussed in these *Letters*, was the son of a bishop of West Gothia, in Sweden, and was born in 1689. He had a liberal education, and by Charles XII. was made professor of the metallic college, and being ennobled in 1719, he took his seat in the triennial assembly of the states.

As a philosopher and metallurgist he distinguished himself by several learned works. But of these he made little account after the year 1743, when he assumed a higher character, of which he speaks as follows. “ Whatever of worldly honour and “ advantage may appear to be in the things “ above mentioned, I hold them but as “ matters of low estimation, when com-“ pared to the honour of that holy office to “ which the Lord himself hath called me, who

" who was graciously pleased to manifest
" himself to me his unworthy servant, in
" a personal appearance, in the year 1743,
" to open in me a sight of the Spiritual
" World, and to enable me to converse with
" Spirits and Angels, and this privilege has
" continued with me to this day. From
" that time I began to print and publish
" various unknown Arcana, which have
" been either seen by me or revealed to me,
" concerning Heaven and Hell, the state of
" men after death, the true worship of God;
" the spiritual sense of the Scriptures, and
" many other important truths tending to
" salvation and true wisdom." *Short Account of his Life*, p. 6.

From this time he devoted himself wholly to theology, and the establishment of his new Church, spending much of his time abroad, especially in London and Amsterdam, where, at a great expence, all his theological works were printed. He died in London, March 29, 1772.

Though Baron Swedenborg was much esteemed at the court of Sweden, and by many persons of considerable distinction in his time, it does not appear that his books were much read, or that his disciples were numerous, till after his death. But it is said in the *Short Account of his Life*, p. 42, that "his theological writings are now "much sought after and held in high esteem by many, not only in England, "Scotland; and Ireland, but also in France, "Germany, Holland, Sweden, Russia, Poland, Turkey, and even in the East and "West Indies, and North and South America; that in most of these places societies "are already formed for propagating the "heavenly doctrines of the New Jerusalem "Church; and that in several kingdoms of "Europe men of talents and repute have "associated together for the purpose of "translating and publishing the author's "works in various languages, for the benefit of mankind in general."

In order to give my readers a clear idea of the writings of Baron Swedenborg, I shall close

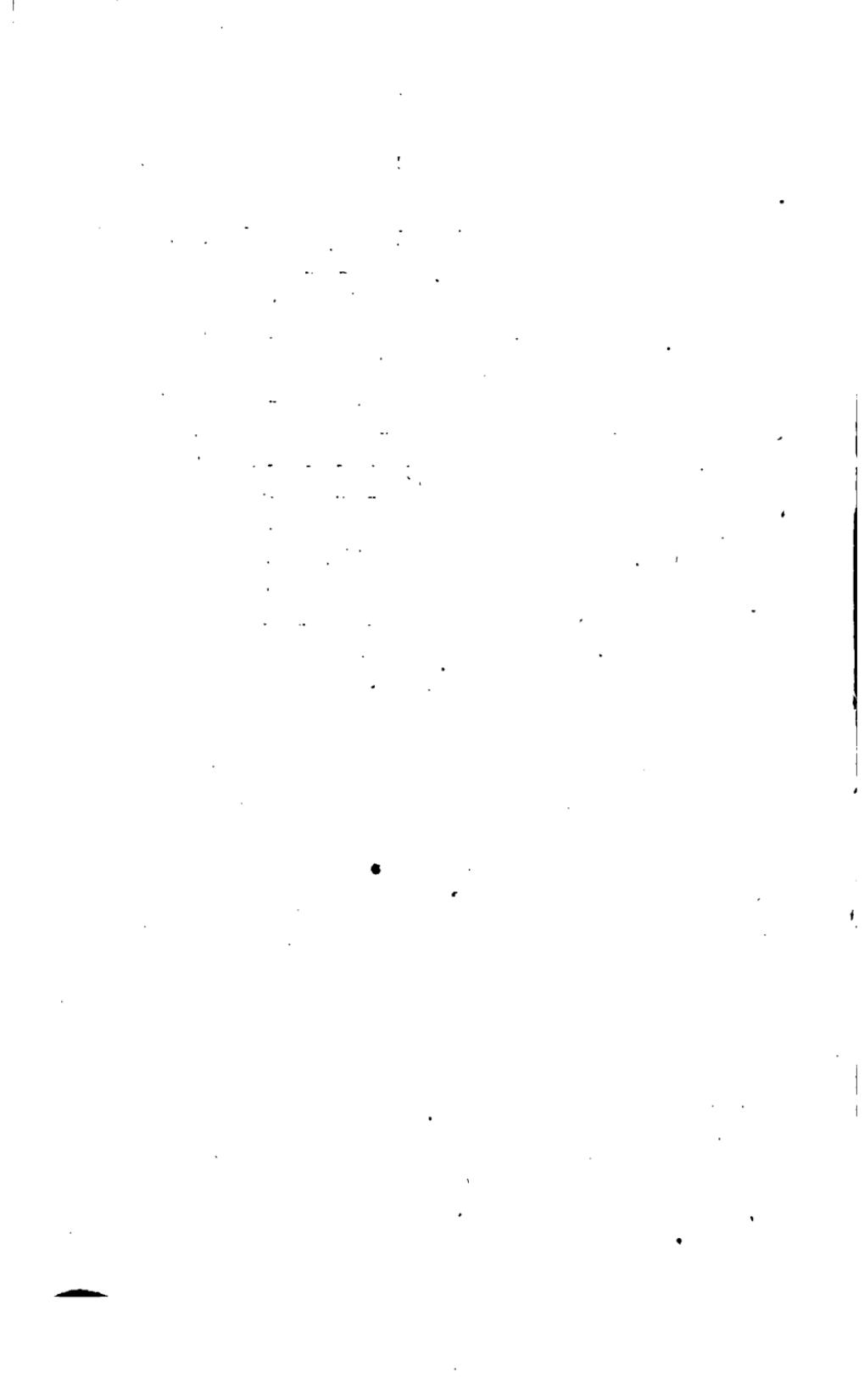
close this Preface with a list of them, and some others relating to them, as printed by Mr. Hindmarsh, No. 32, Clerkenwell Close, London, with the prices annexed.

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P R E F A C E.

12. The Psalms of David, with a Summary Exposition of the Internal Sense - - -	o 3 0
13. A Treatise concerning the Last Judgment and the Destruction of Babylon, which took place in the Spiritual World in the Year 1757 - - - - -	o 2 6
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Errata.

N. B. (b) Signifies from the bottom of the page.

Page 3, l. 10, (b) for *into*, read *in*.
— 5; (Note) l. 1; for *accepts*, read *excepts*.
— 20, l. 2, (b) for *even*, read *even so*.
— 21, l. 11, for *that*, read *their*.
— 23, l. 3, for *as*, read *as*.
— 24, l. 3, for *prayer*, read *prayer was*.
— — l. 10, (b) for *man, the men*, read *men, the man*.
— 28, l. 5, delete *the*.
— — l. 6, (b) for *was*, read *is*.
— 29, l. 10, for *be*, read *had be*.
— — l. 12, delete *and*.

TO
THE MEMBERS
OF

The New Jerusalem Church.

LETTER I.

Concerning the Tenets of the New Jerusalem Church.

.....

MY FELLOW CHRISTIANS,

IT is with peculiar pleasure that I address any class of persons by this appellation, and I am happy to observe that you value christianity as much as I do; having given an incontestible proof of your attachment to it, by the expence you are at in supporting your mode of worship. This zeal does you the greatest honour, as does the frankness with which you avow your principles, opposite as they are to those which generally prevail in the christian world. You are as sensible as I myself am of the many corruptions which have been introduced into christianity, which have so much disfigured it, that it can hardly be known; so that the

B world

world requires to be in a manner re-christianized. We also assign the same source to these corruptions, viz. false philosophy, and the interference of the civil powers in matters of religion. We are even agreed with respect to many of the most important particulars of the corruptions of christian doctrine.

We view with equal horror the doctrine of the trinity, consisting of *three persons in one God*, as equally absurd and blasphemous; constituting, in fact, *three gods*. For such you agree with me in thinking that three persons, each possessed of every attribute of divinity, must necessarily be, and that this doctrine is as contrary to the uniform sense of scripture, as it is repugnant to reason and the plainest common sense, though sanctioned by the most solemn decrees of councils from that of Nice to that of Trent, and by the united force of all the civil powers, in most unnatural alliance with the church of Christ.

We also agree in reprobating the whole system which has now obtained the name of *calvinism*, though it originated with Austin, and has been introduced into all the established creeds; a system which represents the whole human race as so fatally injured by the sin of Adam, that they retain no natural power of doing the will of God; so that had none of them been exempted from the sentence of condemnation by an arbitrary decree, they must all have been doomed to the pains of hell for ever; a system

a system which teaches us that, in order to effect the redemption of a few, God was under a necessity of reversing the known maxims of his conduct, in punishing the innocent instead of the guilty; changing his character of *gracious* and *merciful*, into that of an inexorable tyrant; granting nothing to the most unfeigned repentance, but exacting the uttermost that was due to his justice, and that from a divine person fully equal to himself; nothing less than this being deemed equivalent to the magnitude of the offence: whereas it is justly observed by Mr. Swedenborg, in his *Doctrine concerning the Lord*, p. 95, "there is nothing of vindictive justice in God."

We agree, then, in the important belief of *one God*, and of *one person* in the godhead, in the moral excellence of his character, and in the mild and equitable maxims of his government. We equally consider him as the gracious father of all mankind, having compassion upon men in that state of sin and misery, into which, by the abuse of their natural liberty, they had involved themselves, and excepting none but the voluntary and incorrigibly wicked from the offers of his mercy.

Holding these rational sentiments, I cannot help expressing some surprize that you should be so uncharitable as you are, admitting into heaven none but those who think as you do with respect to the person of Christ. "No one," says Mr. Swedenborg, *ibid.* p. 230, "can be admitted into heaven who

" thinks of there being *three* Gods, howsoever he
" may say with his lips there is but *one*. For the
" life of the whole heaven, and all the wisdom of an-
" gels, is founded on the acknowledgment, and con-
" sequent confession, of *one God*, and on the faith that
" this one God is also man, and that he is the Lord
" who is at once both God and man." In his *Universal
Theology*, vol. ii. p. 424, he expressly says concerning
the Socinians, that " they are cast down into
hell, since they approach God the Father alone."
The same he asserts of the Arians for " denying the
divinity of the Lord's humanity."

As you admit the divine illumination of Mr. Swedenborg, there is, I fear, no prospect of your becoming more charitable. For if you suppose him to have been in an error in some things, especially those which he saw and learned in the spiritual world, you may think him liable to mistake in any thing; and then the whole foundation of your new church fails. I wish, therefore, to reason with you on this foundation of your faith. But I must first describe what appears to me to be the general outline of it, that we may consider the scheme in its whole extent, and thereby form some judgment of the evidence it requires.

Holding the doctrine of *one God*, you maintain that this one God is no other than Jesus Christ, and that he always existed in a human form; that for the sake of redeeming the world, he took upon himself a proper human or material body, but not a human

a human soul, that this redemption consists in bringing the hells, or evil spirits, into subjection, and the heavens into order and regulation, and thereby preparing the way for a new spiritual church ; that without such redemption no man could be saved, nor could the angels retain their state of integrity ; that their redemption was effected by means of trials, temptations, or conflicts with evil spirits ; and that the last of them, by which Christ glorified his humanity, perfecting the union of his divine with his human nature, was the passion of the cross.

Though you maintain that there is but one God, and one divine person, you hold that in this person there is a real *trinity*, consisting of the *divinity*; the *humanity*, and the *operation* of them both in the Lord Jesus ; a trinity which did not exist from all eternity, but commenced at the incarnation.

You believe that the scriptures are to be interpreted not only in a literal but in a spiritual sense, not known to the world till it was revealed to Mr. Swedenborg, and that this spiritual sense extends to every part of scripture *.

* Mr. Swedenborg, however, accepts the *A&Es of the Apostles*, and the *Apostolic Epistles*, though for reasons that do not appear satisfactory to me, since, to all appearance, they are as capable of *secondary senses* as the books of Kings and Chronicles in the Old Testament. See this discussed in the *New Magazine of Knowledge concerning Heaven and Hell*, vol. i. p. 254.

You believe that there are angels attending upon men, residing, as Mr. Swedenborg says, in their affections ; that temptation consists in a struggle between good and bad angels within men, and that by this means God assists men in these temptations, since of themselves they could do nothing. Indeed, Mr. Swedenborg maintains that there is an universal influx from God into the souls of men, inspiring them especially with the belief of the divine unity. This efflux of divine light on the spiritual world, he compares to the efflux of the light from the sun in the natural world.

There are, says Mr. Swedenborg, two worlds, the *natural* and the *spiritual*, entirely distinct, though perfectly corresponding to each other; that at death a man enters into the spiritual world, when his soul is clothed with a body, which he terms *substantial*, in opposition to the present *material* body, which he says is never to rise out of the grave. " After death," he says, that " a man is so little changed, that he even does not know but he is living in the present world, that he eats and drinks, and even enjoys conjugal delight as in this world, that the resemblance between the two worlds is so great, that in the spiritual world there are cities, with palaces, and houses, and also writings and books, employments and mercantile chandizes; that there is gold, silver, and precious stones there. In a word," he says, " there is in the spiritual world, all and every thing that there is in the natural world, but that in heaven " such

"such things are in an infinitely more perfect state." *Universal Theology*, No. 734. Into this spiritual world, Mr. Swedenborg says, that he, though living in this, was admitted, so that he conversed with Luther, Melancthon, and many other persons, as well as with angels.

You believe that the coming of Christ to judge the world, and to enter upon his kingdom, is not to be understood of a personal descent from heaven into this material world, but that they relate to the spiritual world only. That the last judgment took place in the year 1757, and that the spiritual kingdom of Christ, by which you understand the rise and spread of your new doctrine, commenced on the 19th day of June, 1770. This kingdom of Christ, and consequently your doctrine, you believe is speedily to prevail over the whole world, and to continue for ever.

I am, &c.

LETTER II.

Of the Inspiration of Mr. Swedenborg.

.....
MY FELLOW CHRISTIANS,

THE system exhibited in the preceding Letter must be acknowledged to be new, and very extraordinary, differing materially from the faith of every other denomination of christians, and therefore the evidence of its truth ought to be proportionably strong. For, in all cases, the more extraordinary any relation appears, the stronger is the evidence that we require for it. I shall therefore take the liberty to ask, on what authority you receive Mr. Swedenborg as a prophet, or one who had communication with God in the invisible world.

You cannot be ignorant that the only proper evidence of a divine commission is doing something that God alone could enable a man to do. When Moses was appointed by God to carry a message to his nation, and to the king of Egypt, he naturally said, Exod. iv. 1. *But behold they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice; for they will say the Lord hath not appeared unto thee.* In answer to this, God bade him throw down the rod that was in his hand, when it was instantly changed into a serpent, and

and he was ordered to shew the same sign to his countrymen and to Pharaoh, v. 5. *that they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob hath appeared unto thee.* Accordingly he did exhibit that sign, and by this means satisfied them that God had sent him. Also when Moses informs the people, Deut. xviii. 18, that God would send them prophets like unto himself, he tells them that they might distinguish the true prophets from pretended ones by their *fore-telling things to come*, which was another thing that was above the power of man.

Our Saviour did not expect to be believed upon his own word, when he declared that God had sent him; but said, John v. 36, *the works which the father has given me to finish, the same works that I do bear witness of me, that the father hath sent me;* and we find that this was the circumstance that convinced the Jews that he was a real prophet. *Rabbi*, says Nicodemus to him, John iii. 2, *we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles which thou doest except God be with him.* Also the two disciples walking to Emmaus said of Jesus, Acts xxiv. 19, that *he was a prophet mighty in deed, as well as in word, before God and all the people.* Had he done nothing more than another man could have done, he might have been a good man, but he would have given no evidence of his being a prophet.

Do

Do we not object to the divine mission of Mahomet, that he worked no miracles, that all that he pretended to of this kind was the composition of the Koran, which he said was dictated to him by the angel Gabriel. But as he gave no proof of this; as no person even saw the angel Gabriel dictating to him, or in conference with him, and we do not think the composition of the Koran to be above the ordinary capacity of man, we give him no credit for his mere assertion. Besides, neither the truth of the divine mission of Moses, nor that of Christ, depended on the miracles of one man, but on those of many, in conjunction and succession. In the Old Testament we read of numbers of prophets from Moses to Malachi, most of whom either worked what we usually call miracles, or foretold future events, which is exactly of the same nature, being equally within the province of God alone. As to the truth of the christian dispensation, it was confirmed not only by the numerous miracles and resurrection of Christ, but by the miracles of the apostles, and many others, after him, so that the age of christian miracles did not cease but with that generation.

We should naturally expect therefore that another entirely new dispensation, so different from all the former as that of Mr. Swedenborg must be considered, and yet so strictly, as you believe, corresponding to them, should be confirmed by miracles, as the preceding dispensations were, and

by miracles equally numerous and striking; and that one divine messenger alone would not be sufficient for the purpose. To say that though the former dispensations of religion required to be established by miracles, this new one, the last and most magnificent of them all, and which is to continue for ever, requires none, is no better than saying that though a cottage may require to stand upon a rock, a palace, or a temple, like that of Solomon, may be built upon the sand, or stand without any foundation at all.

To come from God with a message to man is a very serious and important thing, for which no man however excellent, hath any right to expect that his own word only should be taken. This is more than was claimed either by Moses, or by Christ; and why should so great a privilege be allowed to any other person? It is very possible a pious and good man, of a warm imagination, may fancy that he has communications with God; but he may deceive himself, especially if his supposed intercourse with God and the invisible world was by night. In this case such a person *seeing an angel in a dream* is nothing more than his *dreaming he saw an angel*; and it is well known that some persons are subject to *reveries* by day, exactly similar to dreams by night. Now I do not find that your pretended prophet, an excellent and good man as I willingly allow him to have been, ever wrought a miracle, or foretold any future event, as a proof of his extraordinary pretensions, and

and his writings appear to me to be nothing more than such as an ingenious and laborious man, of a fertile imagination, was very well capable of.

Mr. Swedenborg himself, I find, was very well aware of this objection to his pretensions. In one of the conversations he had in the spiritual world, he says that it was made to him. "Do "miracles, say those with whom he was conversing, "and we will believe." The reply that he makes to these objectors is, that very probably they would not be convinced by miracles, but resemble the Israelites, who worshipped the golden calf, presently after they had been witnesses to the extraordinary scene from Mount Sinai; and at that instant he says he heard a voice from heaven saying to the objectors, "If ye believe not Moses and the pro- "phets, that is the word of the Lord, neither will "ye be convinced by miracles, any more than the "posterity of Jacob were in the wilderness or when "they saw with their eyes the miracles which the "Lord did during his abode on earth." *Universal Theology*, vol. ii. p. 463.

Another reason which at the same time he gave for his not being empowered to work miracles was, that, "they carry compulsion with them, and take away a man's free will in spiritual matters." But the same objection might have been made to the miracles of Moses and of Christ. It is the nature of all evidence to compel the assent. For no man can refuse his assent to what appears to him

him to be sufficient evidence. Whatever be the case of the *will* with respect to motives, the *judgment* is universally allowed to be necessarily determined by the force of arguments; and had Mr. Swedenborg been possessed of the power of working miracles, I cannot believe that he would have thought it an improper, or an inconvenient thing.

As this is a subject of particular importance, I shall subjoin what your author alleges with respect to it in another part of the same work, vol. ii. p. 123. "Since the time of the Lord's "coming into the world, every one that is born in "a christian country has a capacity to become "spiritual, which spirituality of nature is effected "solely by the Lord, through the word. But this "capacity would be destroyed in case man's faith "was influenced by miracles; in as much as mi- "racles, it was observed, carry compulsion with "them, and take away man's free will in spiritual "things; and whatever is received by compulsion "entereth no farther than the natural man, when "it closeth up the spiritual, or true internal man, "and depriveth him of all capacity of seeing any "truth in its proper light; the consequence where- "of is, that the man afterwards frameth all his "reasonings on spiritual things from a mere na- "tural ground, and thereby feeth all spiritual "things according to an inverted view. Miracles, "indeed, were wrought previous to the Lord's "coming into the world; and the reason was, be- "cause

"cause the members of the church at that time
"were mere natural men, incapable of seeing the
"spiritual or internal things of the church, or who
"would have profaned such things, had they been
"permitted to see them."

But that any change was made in the nature of men at the first coming of Christ, or that any farther change has been made in man since what you call his second coming, is an arbitrary supposition of Mr. Swedenborg's, for which he produces no evidence whatever. And since, in all other respects, men appear to act in the same manner, we must conclude that they are internally constituted in the same manner, and therefore that they have been equally affected by evidence of all kinds since the beginning of the world. We shall see, however, in the progress of your doctrine, whether mankind do not now require the evidence of miracles for the belief of things of which no other evidence can be given, as much as they did in the times of Moses or of Christ. If other methods fail to produce a general conviction of the truth of your doctrine, which you say is to fill the whole earth, recourse must be had to the old, but effectual, method of miracles after all; and should each of your temples be filled with *the glory of the Lord*, at the time of their consecration, as was the tabernacle and the temple of Solomon, you would, I dare say, exult not a little. As a similar glory invested our Saviour at his transfiguration, all the three

three great dispensations of religion, you might then say, were distinguished by a similar divine attestation.

But though Mr. Swedenborg did not pretend to work any proper miracles, and did not, as far as appears from his writings, foretel any future event, he pretends to give us more information concerning things at a distance from us than we had any natural means of knowing. After reporting a conversation which he had with the Africans, and the Gentiles in the spiritual world (of which a farther account will be given in its proper place) which is highly favourable to them, he gives the following narrative of the state of Africa in *this* world, which I find that you who are his followers, believe to be true, and are very willing to consider, notwithstanding your affecting not to want the evidence of miracles, as a proof that he was really inspired. As this account is truly curious, and a society of gentlemen is now exploring the interior parts of Africa, I shall recite the whole of it from the *Continuation concerning the last Judgment and the Spiritual World*, p. 66.

“ Such being ‘the character of the Africans
“ even in this world, there is therefore at this day a
“ revelation begun among them, which is com-
“ municated from the centre round about, but
“ does not extend to the sea coasts. They ac-
“ knowledge our Lord as the Lord of heaven and
“ earth, and laugh at the monks who visit them,
“ and

“ and at christians who talk of a *threefold divinity*,
“ and of salvation by mere *thought*, asserting that
“ there is no man who worships at all, that does
“ not *live* according to his religion; and that unless
“ a man so lives, he must needs become stupid and
“ wicked, because in such a case he receives no-
“ thing from heaven. They likewise give to in-
“ genious wickedness the name of *stupidity*, because
“ there is no life, but death, in it. I have heard the
“ angels rejoice at this revelation, because thereby
“ a communication is opened with the rational
“ principle in man, which has heretofore been
“ closed up by a general blindnes with respect to
“ matters of faith. I was informed from heaven
“ that the things contained in the doctrine of the
“ New Jerusalem concerning the Lord, concerning
“ the word, and in the doctrine of life for the New
“ Jerusalem, lately published, are now revealed by
“ word of mouth, by angelic spirits, to the in-
“ habitants of that country.

Here I am happy to find a virtual appeal to an existing fact, which it is possible to ascertain by proper inquiry. Though, having less communication with the interior part of Africa than with any other part of the known world, the inquiry will be attended with some difficulty and expence. In the mean time I must observe that neither Mr. Bruce's late Travels into Abyssinia, nor the proceedings of the Association for promoting the discovery of the interior parts of Africa, give us as yet any reason to think that what Mr. Swedenborg describes

describes as existing in his time, is to be found at present. But we expect soon to have farther accounts from that hitherto unexplored part of the world; and if it should appear, which I strongly suspect, that there neither is, nor ever was anything like a *New Jerusalem Church* in the centre of Africa, your faith in Mr. Swedenborg's inspiration must be very strong indeed if it be not well shaken.

The evidence of proper miracles being withheld from us for the present, evidence of some other kind, which can only be the conformity of your doctrines to the natural reason of things and the plain sense of scripture, ought to be peculiarly strong. To these tests I shall therefore bring the principal of your doctrines, that we may see whether they bear any internal marks of superior excellence.

As you appeal to the scriptures, you, no doubt, think us capable of judging of your arguments from them. The books of scripture are before us, and the language in which they are written pretty well known. I shall therefore consider whether your opinion be agreeable to the scriptures fairly and rationally interpreted. As to any spiritual sense of the scriptures, it cannot be attended to till there be some evidence of the reality of such a sense of them. If you say that I am incapable of perceiving this sense of the scriptures, you must allow that you have no means of convincing me, or any others who are in the same situation with me, how well

well soever you, who have the illumination that I want, may be satisfied with respect to all your doctrines. Besides, Mr. Swedenborg admits that the plain and literal sense of the scriptures is the foundation of every other sense, and is never contradicted by them. The doctrine of the church, he says, ought to be drawn "from the literal sense of the "word, and be confirmed thereby." *Doctrine concerning the Sacred Scripture*, p. 101. He also says, ibid. p. 65, "the literal sense of the word is the "basis, continent, and firmament, of its spiritual "and celestial sense."

I am, &c.

LETTER III.

Concerning the Person of Christ.

.....
MY FELLOW CHRISTIANS,

I OWN that when I first heard of this tenet of your's, that Jesus Christ was the same person with God the Father, and that there is no other God than he, I was exceedingly surprized. It sounded to me as if it had been asserted that Jesus and Peter, Moses and Joshua, David and Solomon, or any other two persons of whom we read in history, had been the same; and that if the sacred writers

writers could express themselves as they uniformly do concerning God and Christ, as different persons, and they should after all be one and the same person, there is no use in language; the most definite expressions being no guard against misconception. This I know you will say is the effect of prejudice, from early and long continued impressions; and I am willing to allow as much as I possibly can to this influence, and therefore shall re-examine what I own I have hitherto taken for granted. And as Mr. Proud says, in his *Sermons*, p. 41, that "truth will carry its own evidence with it to "the impartial enquirer and upright mind," I hope that whether you or I be at present in an error, in this respect, a clear stating of the case, and an appeal to facts, will be the means of setting us right.

Now it is certainly no uncommon thing for the same thing, or the same person, to be signified by two different names, Jesus, for example, and Christ, Simon and Peter; but then we always find that the same character and description will apply to both, and except the literal significations of the term, be referred to, we may, in any sentence, substitute the one in the place of the other; every thing that can be asserted of the one being equally true of the other. Nothing is ever asserted concerning either of them, that is incompatible with the other; nor will any speaker or writer, knowing the use of language, ever connect two names which denote only the same person by the con-

junctive particle *and*. We say, for example, that Peter and John did this or that, but we never say, that Simon and Peter, Jesus and Christ did this, using the plural number. Because Peter and John are different persons. But Simon and Peter, Jesus and Christ are the same persons, and therefore we naturally say Simon or Peter, Jesus or Christ, or else, joining the two names, we say, Simon Peter, or Jesus Christ, did this or that, using the singular number only.

Now look through the whole New Testament, where God and Christ are spoken of, and you will find by these plain rules concerning the use of words, which every body understands, and in speaking or writing strictly conforms to, that *God* and *Christ*, in the ideas of the persons who wrote those books, were as different persons as Christ and Peter, James and John.

Christ uniformly speaks of himself as having been sent from God, just as much as John the Baptist was; so that if the person *sending* can be the same with the person *sent*, John the Baptist may be God as well as Jesus Christ. I may say that I *go* from one place to another, but it is manifestly improper to say that I *send* myself from one place to another. On your principles, Christ and his apostles might be the same persons. For Christ addressing himself to his Father, says, John xvii. 18. *As thou hast sent me into the world, even have I also sent them into the world.* It is evident, therefore, that Christ was

was a person as different from him whom he addressed as his *Father*, as his disciples were different from himself.

Christ constantly prayed to the person whom he called his *Father*, and he directed his disciples to pray to the same person. *Father*, says he, John xvii. 1, *the hour is come, glorify thy Son, that thy Son may also glorify thee*. Was Jesus then only speaking to himself? Sometimes, no doubt, persons do so; but not in this manner. When Christ directed his disciples to pray to that *Father who seeth in secret*, he surely did not mean that they should pray to himself. If he did, he certainly did not speak very intelligibly. Besides, he plainly distinguishes between praying to the Father, and asking any thing of himself, when he says, John xvi. 23, *In that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you*. Was such language as this, which he constantly uses, calculated to lead the disciples to consider the Father and himself as the same person?

Farther, Jesus frequently ascribed to his Father what he expressly denied of himself. He more than once says, that *of himself he could do nothing*, John v. 19, viii. 28, and that *the Father within him did the works*, meaning the miracles that he performed. Here every thing denoted by the expression *himself*, is evidently distinguished from the Father, who he says, was *within him*, as he might be said to be in any other man, if, as was the case with

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our Saviour, he suggested to him what he should say, and empowered him to do what he otherwise could not have done. Agreeably to this, he says, Matthew xxviii. 18, that *all power was given unto him*, and Luke x. 22, *all things are given unto me of my Father*. Can the *giver* and *receiver* be the same person, any more than the person *sending*, and the person *sent*?

Speaking of the day of judgment, Jesus says, Mark xiii. 32, that the time of it was not known either to the angels or to himself, but *to the Father only*. If the Son was the same with the Father, surely every thing that was known to the one must have been known to the other also; especially as you suppose there was no principle of intelligence in Christ besides that of the Father, he having no human soul. Nay, in addressing his Father, he calls him *the only true God*, at the same time that he speaks of himself as the prophet or messenger of God, John xvii. 3, *that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent*. And when he was risen from the dead, he bade Mary tell his disciples, John xx. 17, *I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God*. Here, surely, are two different persons indicated. Can any person be said to ascend to himself?

Lastly, our Saviour says, John xiv. 28, that *bis Father was greater than he*. Can any person be greater than himself? The same person may, no doubt, be greater at one time than he was at another;

other; but here he speaks of the same time. Also, a man in one capacity may be greater than he is in another; as general at the head of his army may be said to be greater than he is by his fireside. But here our Saviour speaks absolutely. He is telling his disciples that he should leave them, and go to his Father, in which he says they ought to rejoice, intimating that they would be under the protection of the greatest of all beings. Agreeably to this he had said not long before, that they who were his sheep should never perish, since no person was able to pluck them out of his Father's hand, adding, John x. 29, *My Father, who gave them me, is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one,* that is, no person can overpower me, but he must overpower the Father also. Such is our Saviour's constant language, which must certainly have misled his hearers, if he was the same person with the Father, of whose superior power he was speaking, ascribing no extraordinary power to himself, but every thing to God.

Let us now see in what manner the apostles speak of him. Does not their constant language demonstrate that they considered *him* as being a person different from *God*. Peter speaking of him, Acts ii. 22, says, that he was *a man approved of God by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him, and whom God raised from the dead.* Acts iii. 13, *The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our Fathers, has glorified his son Jesus, &c.* When they

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were persecuted, they prayed to God, *Acts iv. 24,* as he *wbo made heaven and earth, and all that is therein,* and the object of their prayer, *that signs and wonders might be done by the name of his holy child Jesus.* Certainly, this was not praying to Jesus, but to quite another person, who alone could work miracles, in order to confirm the mission of Jesus from God, and their own mission from him.

Look into Paul's epistles, and you will always find that he speaks of God and of Christ as of different persons. In the beginning of the first epistle to the Corinthians, where he says, *Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ tbrough the will of God. Grace be unto you from God the Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.* The same is his language through all his epistles, without the least variation. When he gives the Father the appellation of *God*, it is always exclusively of *the Son*, *1 Cor. viii. 6. to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we by him, 1 Tim. ii. 5, There is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the men Christ Jesus.* Could he speak of God and Moses as more different from one another, than he does of God and Christ.

What, then, is it that you can advance in support of your favourite doctrine, that Jesus Christ and God the Father are the same person, in opposition to the constant and uniform language of the scriptures; according to which they must be different persons, as different as God and man, the Creator and the creature. I have considered all that you allege,

allege, and find them only to be a few passages; which literally interpreted, might, indeed, imply as much, but which very easily admit of a very different interpretation; and in all cases we interpret what is figurative and obscure, by what is clear and express; and nothing can be more so than the passages which I have cited above. This, therefore, is most evident from the constant language of scripture, that Christ and God are different persons, and whatever particular passage may seem to intimate the contrary must have some other meaning; and even if we could not explain it otherwise, we ought to content ourselves with acknowledging the difficulty, or suppose some error to have crept into the text, rather than charge the writers with manifest inconsistency and contradiction. But when we examine the passages we shall find that there is far from being any occasion to have recourse to this supposition. The language sufficiently explains itself.

When Philip said to Jesus, John xiv. 8, *Show us the Father*, Jesus said, *he that hath seen me hath seen the Father*; and from this you infer that he and his Father were the very same person. But Jesus, you cannot deny, was used to speak in figurative language; and where is there a more common figure of speech than to say, *we see a person in his works*, and especially in those persons who are commissioned to say or to do any thing in his name. We even say that God, who is invisible, is to be seen in his works. Now the power and wisdom of
God

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God were manifest in Christ, who spake and acted by immediate commission from him; and seeing the manifestations of divine wisdom and power either in the works of nature, or in the sayings and miracles of the prophets, is all that we can see of God, who, is himself invisible.

You also urge, Colos. ii. 9, *In him dwelleth all the fullness of the godhead bodily.* But this might be the case without Jesus Christ himself being God, when the divine power was manifested by him. Nay, the very phraseology of this passage is unfavourable to your hypothesis, for that which dwells in a person cannot be the same thing with himself, but must be different from him.

You urge Christ's saying, John x. 30, that *he and the Father were one*, i. e. the same God. But by the same argument all the disciples of Christ may be proved to be united with them in the god-head. For he prays, John xvii. 11, *that they might be one as they two were one*, ver. 21, *that they all may be one*, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, *that they also may be one in us.* Christ also says Matt. x. 40, *he that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.* But will you infer from this, that Christ, the person that sent him, and they who were afterwards sent by him, were all one.

There is another set of texts upon which I perceive that you lay much stress, though I do not conceive

ceive that any of them are at all to your purpose. They are those in which the same titles are given to God and to Christ. But beings the most different in their natures may, in several respects, resemble one another, and act a similar part, so as to be entitled to the same appellations, without being the same persons. You particularly urge those passages in the prophets in which Jehovah is called *the only Saviour*, as Isa. xlivi. 11, *I am Jehovah, and besides me there is no Saviour*. But both he who saves by another, and that other who saves by his orders and directions, may be equally called *a saviour*. The word *saviour* signifies nothing more than *deliverer*, and therefore Moses, who under God delivered the Israelites from Egypt, and the judges, who delivered them from their various enemies, are properly styled *deliverers, or saviours*, as well as God by whose orders and power they acted. See Judges iii. 9. 2 Kings xiii. 5. Acts vii. 35. Our Saviour says, Matt. xxvii. 9, *One is your Father even God*, but does it therefore follow that we have no other father besides God, and yet, according to your argument, if every person who is called *a saviour* be God, every one who is called *a father* must be so too,

You lay great stress on Christ being called *the Alpha and the Omega*. But this is no more a proper name of God, than *saviour, or father*. It may signify the *chief, or founder* of any thing; as Christ is under God of the christian dispensation, and therefore

A person being occasionally denominated by the name of God is no proof that he is God. You urge Christ being called the *Jehovah our Righteousness*, Jer. xxiii. 6. But if our translation be admitted, Jerusalem is called by the very same name, Jerem. xxxiii. 16, and other names of God make part of the names of men and places. Though, therefore, it should be Christ, and not the prophet's son, that was called *Emmanuel*, which signifies *God with us*, it will not follow that he was God. Princes are sometimes called Gods, to denote their power, and men are called devils to express their bad dispositions. When Jesus said to Peter, *get thee behind me, Satan*, and of Judas that he was *the devil* (for so it ought to be rendered) nothing more was meant than what they said or did was *evil*, or such as was usually ascribed to the devil, not that either of those persons was the devil himself incarnate.

It is something extraordinary that, though you strenuously assert the unity of God in *one person*, and maintain that *three divine persons* must be *three gods*, you still contend for a *trinity*. But it was such a trinity as was never known before. Originally, you say, there was no trinity, but that it commenced at the incarnation, when God took upon him human nature; the intelligent principle in Jesus being called *the Father*, the humanity, or rather the human

man body, *the Son*, and the operation of this divine humanity, *the Holy Spirit*. But why should you make this new, arbitrary, and unnatural use of words. The word *trinity* is not to be found in the scriptures, and I do not see why you should embarrass your scheme with it, but as a sacrifice to popular prejudice, and that this was the case is pretty evident from the Preface to the *Summary View of the heavenly Doctrines of the New Jerusalem Church*, p. 8, in which it is said, that he, that is, Mr. Swedenborg, "denied the divinity of our "Lord Jesus Christ, and there might have been "some plea for fixing on his character opprobrious "epithets which might serve to invalidate his testimony. But when we see that nothing of this is "chargeable upon him, and that his writings have "a direct contrary tendency, viz. to assert the divinity of the Redeemer, and to establish this fundamental article of the Christian faith on the clearest and fullest evidence of holy writ, &c. "how is it possible that any person of a serious character can think it safe to endeavour to lessen the testimony of such a writer." We who are properly *unitarians*, acknowledging the sole divinity of God the Father, and the simple humanity of Christ, make no such apologies as these. We hesitate not to meet the full force of popular prejudice, by admitting the imputations of our adversaries in their most obnoxious forms; confident that truth stands in no need of such a shelter as that to which you have recourse.

On

On your principles, as indeed you acknowledge, every man being made in the image of God, is a trinity, consisting of a thinking principle, and a body, acting by the influence of the thinking principle. But here the three terms are not correlative, and have no proper correspondence. The two first indeed denote *substances*, the one a *spiritual*, and the other a *corporeal* one, but the third denotes no substance at all, expressing a mere *action*, or operation. To be consistent with yourselves, you should say that Christ is the one God, consisting of *two parts*, viz. the divine intellect, and the corporeal frame. But since there is no third substance, there is no proper trinity, and that your system admits of none.

With a change of your phraseology, and very little in your ideas, you are as proper unitarians, as we who are usually called *Socinians*. For we say that the *word*, by which all things were created, and which dwelt in Christ, was the one true God besides whom there is no other, and that without this divine principle Christ was a mere man, as other men are.

What is the difference, excepting in words, between saying that Jesus was a *man united to God*, and a *man inspired by God*, when in this case you cannot pretend to have any proper idea to the word *united*, or can say wherein it differs from *inspired*. *Man and God* being more different in their natures than the iron and clay in Nebuchadnezzar's image,
are

are no more capable of forming a proper *union*, than those substances. Say then, in intelligible language, that Jesus was a man, but that God was with him, and acted by him, and we shall be agreed in words as well as in reality, and every desirable consequence will flow from it. You will then, as now, disclaim all *plurality of Gods*, together with different *persons in the trinity*, and you will effectually secure the truth of all the declarations of Christ, as proceeding from God, just as much as if he himself had been God.

I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

Of some further Particulars concerning the Person of Christ, and the general Plan of Redemption by him.

MY FELLOW CHRISTIANS,

BESIDES your general doctrines of Christ and God being the same person, for which I think I have shewn there is no foundation in reason or the scriptures, you have other ideas concerning the union of these two natures, and the use of the incarnation, which deserve some notice, as they are quite singular. But as they are difficult to

to conceive, I think you will find them no less difficult to prove.

Not content with supposing that the supreme Deity was united to a human body, so as to occupy the place of a soul in that body, you say that this union was not completed all at once, but that it grew more perfect during the whole of our Saviour's continuance upon earth, by means of his trials, or temptations, *conflicts* (as you call them) with the hells, or infernal spirits. In this more complete union of the two natures consists, as you say, *the glorification of his humanity*, so that at length it became entirely *divine*, which no other human body ever will be. This is expressed, though not with the greatest clearness, in the following passage of *The Doctrine of the New Jerusalem concerning the Lord*, p. 153.

“ This human nature from the mother was not
“ transmuted into the divine essence, neither com-
“ mixed with it, as the doctrine of faith, which is
“ called the Athanasian creed, teaches. For the
“ human nature cannot be transmuted into the
“ divine essence, neither commixed therewith.
“ Nevertheless, by our doctrine we maintain, that
“ the divinity assumed an humanity, i. e. united to
“ itself just as a soul is united to its body, so that
“ they were not two but one person, from which
“ circumstance it follows that he put off the hu-
“ manity taken from the mother, which in itself
“ was

“ was like the humanity of another man, and consequently material, and put on the humanity from the Father, which in itself was like unto its divinity, and consequently substantial, by virtue whereof the humanity was also made divine.”

If we ask by what means this humanity became divine, Mr. Swedenborg answers that, it was by temptations. “ It is as yet unknown,” says Mr. Swedenborg, *Doctrine concerning the Lord*, p. 60, “ that the Lord conquered death, or hell, by spiritual combats, which are temptations, and thereby glorified his humanity at the same time, and that the passion of the cross was the final combat or temptation, by which he wholly conquered the one, and glorified the other.”

In consequence of the different degrees of this glorification of the humanity, which is sometimes explained (if that can be said to explain which gives us no clearer ideas of a subject) by a less or a more perfect union between the divine and human nature of Christ, you suppose that Jesus, in the course of his life, as this glorification, or union was gradually advancing, adopted a different mode of speaking with respect to the Father, “ In the state of humiliation,” says Mr. Swedenborg, *ibid.* p. 155, “ he prayed unto the Father as to one different from himself; but in the state of glorification, he spake of the Father as one with himself. In this latter state he said that the Father was in him, and he in the Father, and that the Father and he were

" one ; but in the state of humiliation he under-
" went temptations, and suffered the cross, and
" prayed to the Father not to forsake him. For
" the divinity could not be tempted, much less
" could it suffer the cross."

On this I shall take the liberty to remark that, of what kind soever was the union that was to be formed between the divine essence and the human body, and whatever purpose it was intended to answer, it is extraordinary that he who is omnipotent, and who made all things by a word speaking, should not have effected this union but in a course of time : and Mr. Swedenborg gives us no assistance whatever in forming any idea of the manner in which trials or temptations promoted this union, or why one degree of union (if there be such degrees) might not have answered the purpose as well as another. But, admitting all this, why different modes of speaking should be adopted by our Saviour in the different stages of this union, is particularly incomprehensible, since, in all the cases, both the person speaking, and the person spoken to must have been the very same, viz. the *divine mind.*

It is a fundamental article of your faith, that Christ, or God, is but one person, one thinking intelligent mind, and that there was no other principle of intelligence belonging to Jesus; and certainly the mere body, glorified or not glorified, was incapable of thinking, or dictating any language at all.

all. Consequently, in all the stages of our Saviour's life, it must have been his divinity alone that dictated every word that he uttered; and when he prayed, it must have been to the same divinity, that is, to himself; and therefore there could not have been any occasion for his adopting different modes of speaking in the different periods of his life. Besides, it happens unfortunately for your hypothesis, that when Christ spake of the Father as being *one with himself*, it was at a period prior to his last sufferings, by which you say this union was completed. Also, after his resurrection, and consequently all his sufferings, he still spake of his Father as being different from himself; saying to Mary, John xx. 17, *I am not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.*

One of your writers, however, supposes that all the temptations of Christ were not finished till after the forty days of his continuance on earth, between his resurrection and ascension, and for a purpose that is something curious. "The Lord," says he, "at his crucifixion, but more particularly at his burial and resurrection, rejected, or put off, the whole of his maternal humanity, in so much that he was no longer the son of Mary. In this sense, and so far as relates to the natural world in general, he was fully glorified, having put off all the hereditary impurities of matter, in which the church on earth is involved. But he could not

" yet ascend until he had also put off, and rejected,
" the impurities of spirits and angels. For the
" Lord was not only pleased to bear in his own
" person the iniquities and infirmities of men, but
" also of angels, and thereby he redeemed and de-
" livered both. While he was in the act of thus
" purifying and redeeming angels, he underwent
" something analogous to temptations; their re-
" demption being effected like that of men, by an
" admission of their *proscium*, as it were, assaulting
" his humanity. *But in his love and in his pity he*
" *redeemed them.* This process took up forty days,
" because the number forty corresponds to tempta-
" tions, and signifies complete deliverance there-
" from, and victory over all enemies. This is
" the reason why the Lord's ascension was pro-
" tracted till forty days after his resurrection, at
" which time he ascended above all the heavens
" into the sun of the spiritual world, in the midst
" whereof he eternally resides, as Jehovah God,
" in glorious human form." *New Magazine of*
Knowledge, vol. i. p. 277.

What authority this writer had for this inge-
nious speculation does not appear. But a much
more obvious use of Jesus continuing on earth these
forty days, and one that is plainly indicated in the
scriptures, was that time might be given for a suf-
ficient number of successive appearances to the dis-
ciples, in order to give them the most compleat
satisfaction concerning the resurrection of their
master.

One curious consequence of this supposed glorification of Christ's humanity relates to its effects upon the body, concerning which Mr. Swedenborg says, *Doctrine concerning the Lord*, p. 161, "In as much as, the humanity of the Lord was glorified, i. e. was made divine, therefore after his death he rose on the third day, with his whole body, which never happens to any man. For man is raised only as to the spirit, and not as to the body."

Now, according to the scriptures, the resurrection of Christ is a pattern of our own resurrection, and therefore he is called *the first fruits from the dead*. What were the first fruits under the law, but a sample of the general harvest? Whatever, therefore, Christ now is, we shall be also, when with us, as with him, *Corruption shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality*.

I shall conclude this Letter with noticing some other particulars concerning the trinity.

"The Holy Spirit," Mr. Swedenborg well observes, *ibid.* p. 197, "is not a person separate from the Lord;" and that *to go forth, and proceed*, has no other meaning than to *enlighten, and teach, &c.* But his illustration of this from the nature of angels does not satisfy me. "That there is a threefold nature or trinity in the Lord may be well illustrated," he says, *ibid.* p. 196, "by a comparison with an angel, who has a soul and body, and also a spiritual sphere proceeding from thence, which

"is, as it were, another self without him. Concerning this proceeding sphere, it has been given me to know many extraordinary particulars." Of this, however, we, who have not seen angels, can be no judges.

The reason why this new doctrine concerning Christ and the trinity was not revealed to mankind in any earlier period of the world, is given by our author in the same treatise, p. 247, and I shall quote it at length. "The reason why this doctrine concerning the Lord was not before discovered from the word, is because had it been before disclosed, and seen, still it would not have been received. For heretofore the final judgment was not accomplished, and previous to that judgment the power of hell prevailed over the power of heaven, and man is in the midst between heaven and hell. Wherefore had this doctrine been understood before, the devil, that is, hell, would have taken it out of his heart, and he would moreover have profaned it. This state of the power of hell was altogether destroyed by the last judgment, which is now accomplished, since which time it is in every one's power who desires it to be enlightened and gifted with genuine wisdom." Some evidence, however, should be given of the power of hell being destroyed since the year 1757, when you say the last judgment took place. To all appearance no difference whatever then took place in the power of man to contend with vice or prejudice.

I am, &c.

LETTER V.

Of the second Coming of Christ, and a future Judgment.

.....

MY FELLOW CHRISTIANS,

ANOTHER of the conspicuous doctrines of your new church relates to the second coming of Christ and a future judgment. This you say, has already taken place in the spiritual world, to which alone it belongs, and that it was accomplished in the year 1757, which you therefore make use of as a new epoch from which to date all future events, as christians in general do from the supposed birth of Christ. From this time you suppose your new church, denoted in the scriptures by *the kingdom of Christ*, commences, that it is to spread and fill the whole earth, to continue for ever, there being no termination of the present state of things, or any future judgment to look for. Such are your ideas. Let us now see what the scriptures say on these subjects.

When the disciples were viewing Jesus ascending to heaven, the angels who stood by said to them, *Acts. i. 11, Ye men of Galilee, why look ye up to heaven. This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.* What can be more evident

from this, than that as the ascent of Jesus was personal and visible, his return will be the same, personal and visible, not figurative or emblematical only, meaning not *himself*, but his *doctrines*.

Our Saviour himself, speaking of his second coming, says Matt. xxiv. 30, *And they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.* John xiv. 3, he says unto his disciples, *I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am there ye may be also.* The apostle Paul gives the following more particular account of this great event, 1 Thess. iv. 13, &c. *But I would not have you be ignorant, brethren, concerning them who are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so also those who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (or rather shall have no advantage over) them who are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven. with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.* He also says, 1 Cor. xv. 51, *Bebold I shew you a mystery, we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must*

put

put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality,

Is this account all figurative? If so, what is literal; and if there be any truth in the representation, all who have died are now in a state of death, and are to remain so till the coming of Christ, and this coming will be personal and visible, in the clouds of heaven. At his appearance the dead will be raised first, and then the living will be changed and made immortal, like their deceased brethren. Every particular of this account is wholly inconsistent with your idea of nothing but a *spiritual* coming of Christ, and of there being no resurrection of the dead at all, but each person appearing in his new and substantial body immediately on his quitting this.

Paul compares the resurrection of the dead, 1 Cor. xv. 36, to the revival of seed that has been put into the ground, and we read, Rev. xx. 13, of the sea giving up its dead. But according to you nothing that is ever committed to the ground, or to the sea, will appear again, or any thing else in the place of it. All that the scripture says on this subject evidently goes upon the idea that men are to continue some time in a state of death, and that they are to be raised to life at some distant period, and is by no means consistent with your idea of life once given being never discontinued, or suspended, the mode of it only being changed.

According

According to Mr. Swedenborg, the last judgment took place in the spiritual world only, and of course none could be judged besides those who had been dead. But according to the preceding account of the last judgment, confirmed by other express declarations of scripture, those who shall be found alive at the coming of Christ, and who will not die at all, are to be judged, as well as those who have been dead; and whatever spiritual sense you put upon the scriptures, it must at least be consistent with the literal sense of them. Indeed, if we are not to depend on the literal sense of scripture, we cannot depend upon the truth of historical facts recorded in them. For then Moses may mean something else than a man, the passage of the Israelites through the red sea may be nothing but an emblem of something in the mind, and the whole history of Christ, and the apostles may be a mere parable.

Now, besides what the apostle Paul says of the living as well as the dead appearing before our Saviour, in the passage quoted above, he says, 2 Tim. iv. 1, *I charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus, who shall judge the quick and the dead, at his appearing and his kingdom.* Peter also says, Acts 10. 42, *he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he who is ordained of God to be judge of the quick and the dead;* and again, 1 Pet. iv. 5, *who shall give an account unto him who is ready to judge the quick and the dead.* If this representation, repeated so expressly, be not true in the literal sense of

sense of the words, I do not know what to expect. If the living are not to be judged as well as the dead, and this at some future period, when Christ shall come in the clouds of heaven, there may be no judgment, or future state at all; since the whole rests on the same authority.

Your account of *marriages in heaven*, in whatever sense it be understood, is no less contrary to the plain sense of scripture. Our Saviour says, Luke xx. 34, *the children of this world marry, and are given in marriage; but they who shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection of the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage.* What is the end of marriage, but the propagation of the species: and since you allow this to have no place in the spiritual world, for what purpose is the difference of sexes and what can you mean by conjugal delights in that state. The human frame will, no doubt, be considerably altered in a state the purposes of which will be so essentially different from those of the present; so that the same structure cannot, in all its parts, be adapted to it; though concerning the particulars we can only form conjectures. In this case, however, our Saviour's information is clear and express, so that you set up the authority of Emanuel Swedenborg against that of Jesus Christ.

I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

*Of Mr. Swedenborg's Ideas concerning God, Divine
Influxes, and Angels.*

.....
MY CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

MUCH of the confusion that is apparent in Mr. Swedenborg's conceptions has arisen from his inattention to the first principles of metaphysics, particularly in not distinguishing *substance* from *property*. All that we know of any thing is its properties, such as *hardness* and *colour* in bodies, and *understanding* and *affection* in mind. But these properties, we say, belong to something that is not property, but to which we give the name of *substance*, without, however, having any idea of its nature; so that, in fact, it is a mere convenience in discourse. But Mr. Swedenborg makes that to be substance which all other writers call property.

"God," says he, *Universal Theology*, p. 61, "is *love* itself, and *wisdom* itself, and these constitute "his essence; and this love and wisdom are one." He also says, that "God is *life* itself." Now that God is a Being possessed of love, and wisdom, and life, is intelligible language; but that he is love, and wisdom, and life, is not so, except in a figurative

tive sense. Hence, however, must have been derived his peculiar ideas of *divine influx* from God into the minds of men, resembling the influx of heat and light into natural bodies from the sun, which he says bears the same relation to the natural world, that God does to the spiritual. For since love, wisdom, and life are of the essence of God, all who receive them must derive them from immediate communication with God, and from no other source whatever.

Mr. Swedenborg expresses himself more unintelligibly still on this subject, when, in his *Theosophic Treatise*, he says, p. 5, "The spiritual world did "exist, and does subsist, proximately from its own "spiritual sun, and the natural world, in like manner, from its own natural, or material sun; that "the light from the sun of the spiritual world is "wisdom, and the beat love, and that we receive "these by emanation into our souls." For the natural world, or the earth, does not, in any proper sense, exist, or subsist, from the material sun. They are two independent bodies, which mutually gravitate towards each other.

The doctrine of divine influx is equally unphilosophical. Man is formed with various senses, by means of which he receives all his primary ideas; and these ideas are the elements of all our knowledge; those which Mr. Locke calls *ideas of reflexion*, according to Dr. Hartley, whose observations on this subject are the latest, and by far the most

most accurate of any (though this is not a place to enter upon the discussion) being nothing more than combinations of simple ideas, originally derived from impressions made by sensible objects.

No persons have immediate communications with God except prophets, to whom he has been pleased to reveal his will, in order that they might make it known to others. And the great truths of religion, as taught by the prophets, by Moses, by Christ, and by the apostles, are sufficient of themselves, without any such supernatural influx as Mr. Swedenborg describes, to give us all the knowledge that is necessary to purify the heart, and regulate the life, which is the great end of all religion.

If such beings as men, i. e. beings capable of reflexion, and of a reasonable regard to their own happiness, be only informed that there is a God who governs the world in righteousness, that he takes an account of our conduct here, and that, though we die, he will some time hence raise us to life again, and reward or punish us according as we shall have deserved, we shall have all the knowledge that is necessary for the business of religion; because we shall have sufficient motives for the right government of our passions, and of our conduct in life. And when ordinary means are sufficient, it is not in the usual plan of providence to have recourse to extraordinary ones. If men will not hear Moses and the prophets, Christ, and the apostles,

apostles, neither will they regard the visions of Mr. Swedenborg, especially as we have no intimation given us in their writings, that any such prophet was to succeed them.

Mr. Swedenborg's notion of *angels residing in men's affections* is of a nature similar to his doctrine of divine influx; since according to him, our passions and affections are very much influenced from this foreign source. In his *Treatise concerning the last Judgment*, p. 12, he says, "That angels and spirits are with man, and in his affections, has been given me to see a thousand times, from their presence and abode in me. But angels and spirits do not know what men they are with, any more than men know what angels and spirits they co-habit with. For this the Lord alone knows, and regulates." He adds, p. 11, "They who are unacquainted with the mysteries of heaven, may suppose that angels subsist without men, and men without angels. But I can positively assert, from all my experience relative to heaven, and from all my discourse with the angels, that no angel, or spirit whatever, subsists independent of man, or any man independent of spirits and angels; but that they are mutually and reciprocally conjoined. Mankind and the angelic heaven form one, and subsist mutually and reciprocally from each other; and consequently, if either were removed, the other would cease to exist."

Now,

Now, according to Mr. Swedenborg himself, angels are real beings, in the form of men, and have all of them been men, who when they die throw off the material body, and appear in what he calls their *substantial*, or *celestial body*. They must, therefore, as it should seem, occupy a portion of real space as they did before, and consequently cannot reside except in real place. But what space, or place, is there in the *affections*, which are only properties of the mind? What room is there for a good angel in the affection of *love*, or for a bad one in that of *anger*? Angels are *substances*, corporeal or spiritual, and according to any system of metaphysics, it is absurd to speak of any substance subsisting in a mere property. You may as well look for angels in the colour of a man's skin, or in the sound of his voice, as in his affections.

Besides, if angels be necessary to the affections of men, must not some beings of a similar nature be necessary to the affections of angels? Also, what was there to reside in the affections of the first men, who on their deaths only became the first angels?

It is another consequence of Mr. Swedenborg's supposing that the Divine Being consists of mere properties, that he bears no relation to space, or time, which, indeed, has been the idea of other metaphysicians of great refinement. "God," says he, *Universal Theology*, p. 40, "is in space without space, and in time without time;" supposing space and

and time to have commenced at the creation. But though we can, in imagination, suppose the Divine Being himself not to have existed, it is impossible for us to exclude the ideas of *space*, or *duration*. Infinite space, and infinite duration, must ever have existed, and if God be omnipresent, as Mr. Swedenborg allows, and likewise self-existent, he must necessarily bear some relation to space, and also to duration, or time.

Again, though the mere properties of *wisdom* and *love* constitute the *essence* of God, Mr. Swedenborg assigns him two other principles, different, as they should seem, from properties; viz. the *esse* and the *essence*, the former, as his translator and expositor says (*Universal Theology*, note, p. 27) being "his inmost ground, and most hidden principle of being; whereas the *essence* is the particular quality, or determination, originating in the *esse*; and *existence* is the external manifestation, or operation, of both." Of this I own I am incapable of forming any ideas at all.

But what is the greatest puzzle of all is, that, though the Divine Being consists of nothing but the properties of *wisdom*, *love*, and *life*, he has a *form*, and this form is that of man. "Both substance, and form," says Mr. Swedenborg (*Universal Theology*) p. 29 "may be predicated of God; with this distinction, that he is a substance and form self-existent, sole-existent, and primary; and this form is truly and virtually human, that is, God

" is true and very man, in whom all things are infinite." Accordingly it appears from the writings of Mr. Swedenborg, that he considered God as having existed in a human form even before his incarnation.

But this opinion, besides being highly degrading to the Divine Being, has no countenance from the scriptures, or from reason. When a voice was heard from mount Sinai, Moses repeatedly observed to the people, that they saw no *form* whatever; apprehensive, no doubt, that their entertaining an idea of God having any particular form might be attended with inconvenient consequences. According to the uniform language of scripture, God is equally, and every where present; and if so, what form can he possibly have? It can be nothing but that of infinite space.

To give to God the form of man, is to assign him all the functions of man, and a mode of life similar to that of man. The form of any particular animal, beast, fowl, or fish, is adapted to its own occasions, and to nothing else. If the form be changed, as from a caterpillar to a butterfly, the whole mode of life is changed in proportion. In fact, therefore, to give to the Divine Being the form of a man, is to make him a man, and nothing more. In like manner, should the form of a horse be given to a man, it would be nothing less than changing the man into a horse.

Father,

Farther, since every thing that has *form* is *substance*, what became of that which belonged to God prior to the incarnation? Was the whole of the spiritual substance enveloped in a human body; and if he had arms and legs, &c. in his original state, did he make use of them in removing from one place to another; and if not, of what use were they? Also, was the divine form male or female? Since the two sexes correspond to each other, he ought to be both, or neither. Indeed, Gentlemen, it is impossible to consider your opinions on serious subjects with perfect seriousness.

Lastly, I do not perceive the consistency of your own ideas with respect to God. You say, he consists of nothing but the properties of *wisdom, love, and life*. But what relation have any of these to *form*? It resembles Addison's apparition, which was in the shape of *the sound of a drum*.

Hoping that amusement will not be wholly inconsistent with instruction,

I am, &c.

LETTER VII.

*Of the Spiritual World, and of the Interpretation of
the Scriptures.*

.....
MY FELLOW CHRISTIANS,

MR. Swedenborg's account of his conversations in the world of spirits, which is the grand source of all his revelations, appears to me very much to resemble that of dreams, or reveries, to which some persons awake are subject. His idea of there being no *space* in the spiritual world, but only the appearance of it, was suggested to him by what was represented to his mind in those visions. For, continuing in the same place, he fancied himself to be transported to a great distance, and after conversing with the inhabitants of one world, he sometimes instantly found himself in another. All this passing in his own mind, he naturally concluded, that the objects which seemed to occupy real space, in what he calls *the Spiritual World*, such as mountains, and vallies, seas, and rivers, &c. had no real bulk, but only the appearance of it. In this ideal space, however, Mr. Swedenborg places the Divine Being in a human form, all human beings that have ever lived, or that ever will live on the earth (in which, according to him, men will continue

continue to be produced for ever) and likewise all the men produced in millions of other worlds, which are continually pouring into it, and will never be able to fill it; all existing, as he says, in their substantial bodies, and forms.

That there is no real space in the spiritual world, Mr. Swedenborg says, "was made plain to me from this consideration, that there I could see Africans and Indians very near me, although they are so many miles distant here on earth; nay that I could be made present with the inhabitants of other planets in our system, and also with the inhabitants of planets that are in other worlds, and revolve about other suns. By virtue of such presence (i. e. without real space) not of *place*, I have conversed with apostles, departed popes, emperors, and kings; with the late reformers of the church, Luther, Calvin, and Melancthon, and with others from distant countries." *Universal Theology*, vol. i. p. 87. This has certainly very much the appearance of *dreams*, and they must have been very pleasant ones.

Having conceived this idea, of there being no real space in the spiritual world, he farther concluded, as appears in his *Treatise concerning the Earths in the Universe*, that though much time was sometimes spent in his passage from one of these earths to another, especially when they were situated beyond the bounds of the solar system, this time was employed, not in any actual removal

from place to place, but in producing a change in the state of his mind, necessary to his having intercourse with beings whose states were different from his. "A spirit," he says, p. 175, "is conducted from place to place no otherwise than by changes of the states of his interiors; which changes appear to him, in all respects, like advancements from place to place, or like journeyings." Speaking there of his visiting a fourth earth in the starry heavens, he says, "these changes continued without interruption for about ten hours, before I came from the state of my own life to the state of life peculiar to the spirits of that earth; consequently before I arrived there as to my spirit."

This spiritual world of Mr. Swedenborg bears some resemblance to the *ideal world* of Plato. Both, however, are equally the work of imagination; and it is remarkable that, as in dreams, Mr. Swedenborg had no real new ideas communicated to him in the different worlds that he visited, but only such combinations of old ideas as commonly occur in dreams. Wherever he went, he found beings in the form of men, and the same animals that we have here, hills and vallies, seas and rivers, as with us; and though he visited not only the moon, and the planets of our system, but also various planets belonging to other suns, he says nothing of that which has lately been discovered by Dr. Herschell. Had that planet, which, being the remotest that we are yet acquainted with in our

system, is sufficiently entitled to distinction, no existence at that time? This does not look like inspiration.

There is something striking in Mr. Swedenborg's notion of the universal heaven resembling one man, therefore called by him *the grand man*, and that all things appertaining to man, both his exteriors and interiors, correspond to that man, or heaven. But there is no more foundation for it, than for his account of the spiritual world in general. To constitute this grand man, he says, p. 9, "there is need of spirits from several earths, " those who come from our earth into heaven not " being sufficient for this purpose.

In this grand man he finds the inhabitants of all the different worlds that he visited; and to some of them he assigns one station and to others another. The spirits in mercury, he says, have relation to the *memory*, but to *the memory of things abstracted from terrestrial and merely material objects*. Those in Mars have relation to *thought grounded in affection*, p. 101, those in Saturn, p. 121, to the *middle sense between the spiritual and the material man*; and those in Venus, p. 126, to the *memory of things material agreeing with the memory of things immaterial*. The spirits of one of his earths relate to the *spleen*, and those of others to different parts of the body. But what makes this subject more curious, is that in this way he finds reasons, p. 133, why the Lord was willing to be born

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on our earth, and not on another. It was that the word might be written on our earth, and by this means be published and preserved to all posterity, in consequence of the art of writing having existed here from the most ancient time. "In every other earth," he says, p. 136, "divine truth is manifested by word of mouth, and not conveyed far beyond the limits of families; so that unless a new revelation constantly succeeds, truth is either perverted, or perishes." To these reasons he adds, that the inhabitants and spirits of our earth, in *the grand man*, have a relation to *natural and external sense*. He adds other reasons, concluding with saying, p. 139, "but this is an *Arcanum* which will be intelligible only to very few;" and in this small number I do not find myself included.

There is certainly no small confusion in the ideas of Mr. Swedenborg when he makes *the heavens* in the spiritual world synonymous to *angels*, and the *bells* to *devils*; as if these *real beings* and the *place* which they occupy were the same thing. But it is similar to his making angels reside in men's affections, as if they were necessary parts of them, i. e. mere properties, and no substance at all; which he likewise asserts concerning God.

But in cases in which either reason or the plain sense of scripture fails you, you find abundant resources in secondary and spiritual senses of the sacred writings. The sacred writers, however, are far

far from saying that they had any other meaning than that which appears on the face of their writings, and which is to be found in the customary sense of their words; and if other senses be once admitted, there is no end of diversity of opinion. Different persons interpret even the literal sense differently. What, then, will be the case if, besides this literal sense, there be another concealed one, with respect to which every person will, of course, think himself at liberty to form his own conjectures?

There is nothing that a man may not fancy that he finds in the sacred writings, or any others, when he is not confined by the plain and usual acceptance of the words before him, but gives such a loose to his imagination as your great prophet does. He finds Christ in every passage of the scriptures, even those in which before him they who made the most of the doctrine of types, never suspected any such reference.

"As the word," says Mr. Swedenborg, *Doctrine concerning the Lord*, p. 12, "is the divine truth, it is also the divine proceeding; and this is not only from the Lord, but it is also the Lord himself. As the word is thus the Lord himself, all the word in general, and each part in particular, is written concerning him alone. For from the prophet Isaiah unto Malachi, there is not a single thing that does not relate to the Lord, or that, being in the opposite sense, is not contrary

" contrary to the Lord. That this is the case has
" heretofore been seen by no person, but nevertheless
" every one has a capacity to see this, provided
" that he knows it, and thinks thereof while he is
" reading, and farther knows that there is not only
" a natural sense of the word, but also a spiritual
" sense contained in it, and, that in that sense, by
" the names of persons and of places is signified
" something of, or belonging to, the Lord, and
" consequently something from him relating to
" heaven, and the church, or something opposite
" thereto." He even says, *ibid.* p. 74, that " in
" the historical parts the same things are repre-
" sented by the wars of the children of Israel, with
" various nations. For whatever is written either
" in the prophetical or historical parts of the
" word, hath respect unto the Lord, and hence
" the word is divine."

Now, not to remark on the manifest absurdity of making a real person, whether God or man, to be the same thing with *a writing* concerning him; I would ask, how are we to know when our minds are in a state favourable to the perception of this spiritual sense of scripture, which Mr. Swedneborg describes? You will say that yours are in that state, and that mine is not. But you must allow me to ask, what evidence do you give of this being the case, when, as you must acknowledge, there is no visible token of it. Your persuasion must, therefore, remain with yourselves, it being incapable of being communicated to me. For though I have

have probably given as much attention to the scriptures as you have done, the construction that Mr. Swedenborg puts upon them appears to me extremely unnatural; and, divesting myself as much as I am able of all prejudice, I cannot help thinking that, if there be any use in language to express men's meaning, he has strangely misrepresented them.

I am, &c.

LETTER VIII.

The Conclusion.

MY FELLOW CHRISTIANS,

I MUST now, and I can do no more, appeal to your reason, whether the religion which you have adopted on the authority of one man, be either rational or scriptural. You well know that a faith not founded on evidence (of which our own reason is the only judge) is nothing but delusion, whatever be the source of it, whether men impose upon themselves, or be imposed upon by others. When we receive truths on the authority of revelation, we must first judge by our own reason whether the revelation be real or pretended, unless it be revealed to us in particular, that

that another person *has* had a revelation; and this you will hardly pretend to be your case with respect to Mr. Swedenborg.

It is not easy to account for the conduct of any particular man, and therefore I am not obliged to prove that Mr. Swedenborg was either an enthusiast, or an impostor. I know too little of him. But judging by appearances, from his writings, I cannot help saying that his accounts of what he saw and heard in the spiritual world are so copious and particular, that it is barely possible that the whole should have passed so distinctly in his imagination, either in dreams or reveries; and that they read very much like inventions, and fictions. At least, though something may have passed in his imagination, it must have been helped out, and improved, at his leisure afterwards; and it is no uncommon thing to find this mixture of enthusiasm and imposture.

But I would not be understood to accuse him. *To his own master be standeth or falleth*; and let him have been ever so honest and good a man, so that he should have really thought himself divinely commissioned to write every thing that he has done, there is sufficient evidence that it was not the *spirit of truth* that dictated his writings. Should any Being, in the complete form of an angel, tell me that God had the form of a man, that this God was Jesus Christ, that he was not to return to this world to raise the dead and judge all mankind,
that

that there are marriages in heaven, &c. &c. &c. I should tell him that he was a *lying spirit*, and that what he told me could not be true, since both reason and the scriptures, much better authorities than an angel, told me the contrary.

Be persuaded then to re-examine these things, and believe no man in contradiction to your own reason, and the clear sense of scripture; and then I think that the following plain scheme of religion will approve itself to your minds. There is one God, of whose *essence* we know nothing at all. He is invisible, and not the object of any of our senses, but he is the maker and constant preserver of all things. This great Being has at different times commissioned various men, and especially Jesus Christ, to communicate his will to mankind, and he always sanctioned their missions by the power of working miracles, or doing such things as no man could have done if God had not been with him. By this means we have been informed concerning our duty here, and our expectations hereafter, and especially that Christ, who rose from the dead, and is ascended into heaven, will return with power and great glory, when all the dead will be raised, and all the living so changed, as to be like them, incorruptible and immortal; and when they will all receive according to their works.

This religion is equally simple, rational, and effectual, with respect to all the real uses of religion, which is to teach men virtue, and to train them

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them up for a state of future glory and happiness.

This system is easily comprehended and explained. There is nothing intricate or mysterious in it, and it requires no implicit faith in any man. Let all the facts be examined by the common well known rules of estimating the value of human testimony, and you will find the history of Moses and the prophets, of Christ and the apostles, as well authenticated as any other histories in the world; indeed much better. We believe no man's mere assertion, however well meaning or honest, but consider whether what he advances be rational in itself, and supported by proper evidence. As you are *unitarians*, I trust you will continue so; and if you only withdraw your implicit faith in a man who gave no *proof* of his inspiration, and whose peculiar opinions are wholly unsupported by reason or the plain sense of scripture, you will be what other unitarians are.

I can easily conceive in what manner Mr. Swedenborg was led to form his peculiar idea concerning the person of Christ, strange as it appears to me and others. He had been brought up in the firm belief of the divinity of Christ; and, with this strong prejudice on his mind, he could see nothing in our Saviour that he did not think to be *divine*. But being struck with the absurdity of the common doctrine of the *trinity*, and having of course a dread of *polytheism*, he saw no alternative, but that of maintaining the *sole divinity of*

Jesus

Jesus Christ; and his wonderful ingenuity, and peculiar metaphysics, enabled him to support his opinion in the manner that he has done.

Let me entreat you, however, to re-consider his peculiar kind of unitarianism, and see whether it have any peculiar advantage. It does not simplify the idea of God more than our opinion. For we equally believe God to be *one Being*, and *one person*. You have no nearer access to this one God, in consequence of his being in the form of a man, and of his having been incarnate. For we believe that God, who is invisible and omnipresent, sees and hears us wherever we are, and that his power extends to all persons, and all things. The union of a human body to his divine nature (supposing a thing so manifestly unnatural not to be impossible) could only tend to impede, and by no means to facilitate, his operations, of whatever kind they be. You yourselves suppose that when our present material body shall be thrown off, the substantial, or spiritual, man within us will be disengaged, and act to more advantage than before. And can the infinite mind be a gainer by that very circumstance which necessarily fetters, and degrades, a finite one?

You make the belief of the sole divinity of Christ to be necessary to salvation. But this is an arbitrary position, calculated, like the similar declaration of the catholics, to frighten people into
your

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your system. For unless such a faith has a greater tendency to purify the heart, and amend the life, it cannot really make a man more fit for heaven. Your system has no superior efficacy of this kind; and ours, as I have shewn, does every thing that can be done for man in this respect.

In charity, at least, we have a manifest advantage over you. For, lame and imperfect as many systems of christianity are, we admit that while they teach the doctrine of a future state, and that man's future happiness or misery does in any way depend upon, or correspond to, their moral conduct here, they have so much good in them, as may counteract all the evil; and we believe that if the temper of the mind be in the main right, no error in judgment will exclude any man from heaven. There I hope to meet Mr. Swedenborg and you his followers; and when you see what you will then be immediately witness to, all the notions you cherish so fondly at present will vanish like a dream, and have no fatal consequences. But, in the mean time, it is certainly better to have a sensible and a rational faith, a faith that you can comprehend, and give a reason for, than a faith of which you can neither give a clear account of what it is, or on what it is founded; and in all cases truth is preferable to error.

Though I do not pretend to any supernatural influx from the sun of your spiritual world, I am
con-

conscious that I write these letters from the *spirit of love*, and I hope you will perceive that they likewise proceed from a *sound mind*; and with my sincere prayers to the true *fountain of light*, the *giver of every good and every perfect gift*, that we may all lead, and be led, into the real truth.

I am,

Your friend and fellow christian,

J. PRIESTLEY.

London, Oct. 1, 1791.

APPENDIX.

AS my readers will be able to form but an imperfect idea of Mr. Swedenborg's writings from the quotations I have had occasion to make from them in these *Letters*, I shall, for their greater satisfaction, subjoin some larger extracts. The following are copied from the *Universal Theology*, as recited at the *General Conference of the members of the New Church held in Great East Cheap, London, from the 13th to the 17th of April, 1789*. See the *Minutes of that Conference*, p. 7, &c.

“ I shall relate the following particulars, which I know “ to be true, because I have been an eye-witness of them, “ and therefore can testify the truth of them....I was “ once raised up as to my spirit into the Angelic Heaven, “ and introduced to a particular society therein; and im- “ mediately some of the wise ones of the society came to “ me and said, **WHAT NEWS FROM EARTH?**—I replied, “ This is new, that the Lord hath revealed Arcana, which “ in point of real excellence exceed all the Arcana here- “ tofore revealed since the beginning of the Church.— “ They asked, What Arcana? I answered, The follow- “ ing.” Here follows the several articles of his discov-
erries.

“ The

“ The angels, on hearing an account of all these new discoveries made to mankind, were much rejoiced; but they saw that I was sorrowful and dejected, and they asked, What is the cause of thy sorrow? I replied, Because these Arcana at this day revealed by the Lord, notwithstanding their superiority in excellence and dignity above all the knowledges that have been heretofore published to the world, are yet reputed on earth as things of no value. The angels wondered at this, and requested the Lord’s permission to look down into the world; and they looked down, and lo, mere darkness was therein: and it was suggested to them to write those Arcana on a paper, and let the paper down on earth, and then they would see a prodigy; and they did so, and lo! the paper, on which the Arcana were written, was let down from heaven, and in its progress, whilst it was yet in the spiritual world, it shone bright like a star, but when it came into the natural world, the light disappeared, and as it fell on the ground, it was totally darkened; and when it was let down by the angels among some assemblies consisting of learned clergy and laity, many of them were heard to mutter words to this effect, What have we got here? Is it any thing or nothing? What matters it whether we know those things or do not know them? Surely they are the offspring of imagination and a disordered brain: And it appeared as if some took the paper and folded it into different shapes, and then again unfolded it with their fingers; and also as if some tore it in pieces, and were desirous to tread it under their feet; but they were prevented by the Lord from proceeding to such enormity, and the angels were charged to take up the paper back again, and secure it; and because these things affected the angels with sorrow, they began to think with themselves how long the darkness on earth would continue, it was told them, FOR A TIME, AND TIMES, AND HALF A TIME.”

Rev. xii. 14.

"I am aware that many, who read the *memorable relations* annexed to each chapter of this work, will conceive that they are the fictions of imagination; but I protest in truth that they are not fictions, but were really seen and heard; not seen and heard in any state of the mind in sleep, but in a state when I was broad awake; for it hath pleased the Lord to manifest himself to me, and to send me to teach the things relating to his New Church, which is meant by the New Jerusalem in the Revelation; for which purpose he hath opened the interiors of my mind, or spirit, by virtue of which privilege it was granted me to have commerce with angels in the spiritual world, and at the same time with men in the natural world, and that now for twenty-seven years. Who in the Christian world would have known any thing concerning heaven and hell, unless it had pleased the Lord to open spiritual vision in some person or other, and to shew and teach what relates to the spiritual world?

I shall close these extracts with some from Mr. Swedenborg's *Treatise concerning the last Judgment.* p. 127.

"That the Babylon here treated of" (viz. in the *Revelation*) "is destroyed, no other man can know than he who saw it, and to me it was given to see in what manner the last judgment was executed and accomplished on all, particularly on those who were from Babylon; wherefore I shall give a description thereof. This was granted me principally for this reason, that it might be known to the world, that all things predicted in the *Revelation* are divinely inspired, and that it is a prophetic book of the word. For unless this were revealed to the world, and at the same time the internal sense discovered, which is contained in every expression therein, in like manner as in every prophetic

“ phetic book of the Old Testament, that book might
“ be rejected, &c. To prevent therefore this from being
“ the case, it has pleased the Lord to make me an eye-
“ witness,” &c.

He then describes the manner in which the last judgment took place in all the four quarters of the Babylonian nation, beginning with the Southern, to which I shall confine this Extract.

“ After visitation, destruction took place; for visitation
“ always precedes destruction. Visitation is an examina-
“ tion as to their quality, and also a separation of the
“ good from the bad, when the former are taken away,
“ and the latter left behind. This was followed by great
“ earthquakes, from which, perceiving the last judgment
“ to be at hand, a sudden trembling seized them all.
“ Then they who dwelled in the Southern quarter, par-
“ ticularly in that great city of which mention is made
“ above, were seen to run up and down; some endea-
“ vouring to escape by flight, some hiding themselves in
“ caves, some in the cells and vaults where their treasures
“ were deposited, and some carrying away thence what-
“ ever they could lay their hands upon.”

“ But after the earthquakes there burst forth an ebullition from below, which overturned every thing in the city, and in the parts adjacent. After the ebullition there came a strong wind from the East, which laid bare, shook, and overthrew every thing from the very foundation. Then all who were in that quarter were brought forth from every part and hiding place, and cast into a sea of black water, to the amount of several myriads.”

“ Afterwards, there arose a smoke from the whole region, as from a great fire, and at last a thick dust,
“ which

“ which was conveyed by the eastern wind to the sea, “ and covered it all over. For their treasures were turned “ into dust, together with all those things which they had “ called holy, because in their possession. The reason “ why that dust covered the sea was, because such dust “ signifies damnation. At length there was seen as it “ were something black flying over the whole tract, “ which had the appearance of a dragon, a sign that the “ whole of that great city, and the whole of that tract “ was made a desert. The reason of such appearance “ was, because by dragons are signified the falses of that “ religion, and by the place of their abode is signified a “ desert after its overthrow, as in Jer. ix. &c. Some “ were also seen to have as it were a millstone round “ their left arm, which was representative of their having “ confirmed their abominable tenets from the word. For “ such is the signification of a millstone. Hence it ap- “ peared what is signified in the Revelation by these “ words, *An angel took up a stone like a great millstone,* “ *and cast it into the sea, &c.*”

“ But they who were of the assembly held in the same “ quarter, but nearer the East, wherein they consulted “ about the means of enlarging their dominion, and of “ keeping the people in ignorance, and thence in blind “ obedience, were not cast into that black sea, but into a “ gulph which opened itself to a wide extent around “ them, and a great depth under them.”

“ In this manner was the last judgment accomplished “ on the Babylonians in the Southern quarter.”